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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
Docket Management Room
PL-401
400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Draft Interpretations for Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Lamps, Reflective devices and Associated Equipment. [DOCKET NO. NHTSA 03-15651]

Grote Industries, LLC is a manufacturer of safety equipment for the automotive industry, including passenger cars and heavy-duty tractor/trailers. Our products include lights, mirrors, wiring systems, and other safety devices. Grote has, throughout our history as a company, been interested in improving the quality and effectiveness of safety devices used on these vehicles.

Grote appreciates the opportunity to comment on the interpretations that NHTSA is proposing on compliance of replacement lamps and replacement lamp components in the Federal Register on Thursday July 17, 2003 under the above docket number.

NHTSA has proposed two interpretations based on requests from Calcoast ITL. We would like to respond to each draft individually. The first question as written in the Federal Register is as follows.

"This replies to your letter requesting an interpretation of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 108, Lamps, reflective devices, and other associated equipment. You asked whether replacement lamps are required to have all the functions of original lamps. You also asked whether replacement lamps for the rear of a vehicle may have the reflex reflectors in a location that is inboard from that in the original lamps. We respond to your questions below. You asked your questions in connection with replacement lamps for the rear of certain Honda Civics. The Honda Civics, as originally manufactured, include two lamps on each side of the rear of the vehicle, one lamp on the vehicle body and an adjacent one (inboard from the other lamp) on the decklid (back of the trunk). The lamps on the vehicle body include a reflex reflector. You stated that you have received two sets of replacement lamps for testing that would replace all four of these original lamps. In both cases, there is no reflex reflector on the replacement lamps for the vehicle body. However, a reflex reflector is included on the adjacent replacement lamp for the decklid. As discussed below, these lamps would not comply with Standard No. 108."

In the interpretation, NHTSA also references two letters as examples of their position. A letter to Mr. Watt asking if LED lamps can replace incandescent lamps in a taillight using clear lenses. In this case, the answer is no based on the ability to provide compliance of the vehicle/lamp using a different component than that originally supplied by the OEM.

The second letter to Mr. Chen the question is asked about replacing headlamps with replacement lamps that utilized different bulbs than the ones originally supplied by the OEM. In this letter, the answer was consistent with the previous answer.

Grote Industries agrees with NHTSA's position that lamps such as described in the example and in the referenced letters should meet all of the same functions as the OEM supplied and certified lamps using the same components. In the OEM car and heavy truck market, the lamp design is often an integral part of the entire vehicle design. Many times the design is part of the overall aerodynamic and styling package of the vehicle. In these instances, it is imperative that replacement parts wholly replace the original OEM supplied lamp. Providing functions in different configurations and colors confuses the installer (typically the vehicle owner) and provides opportunity for incorrect installation and failing to comply with the requirements set forth in FMVSS 108. In the cited example, the missing function (reflex reflector) was supplied on a separate lamp, which may or may not have been installed along with the other lamp. Neglecting to install this separate component would cause this vehicle to be in non-compliance with FMVSS 108

Grote does not think however that the interpretation makes a good enough distinction between the described OEM scenario and standard industry practice in the "Heavy Duty" truck and trailer market. In this segment of the industry, replacing OEM supplied equipment is commonplace not only among lamps, but among other components as well. The installation is usually performed by trained and qualified service and repair mechanics. The agents involved in making the replacement decisions are also in frequent consultation with the manufacturers to ensure proper compliance of the replacement lamps.

The following situations are examples of current industry practice that may be affected by this interpretation.

1. Rear combination ("Box") lamps. These lamps are typically found on the rear of Truck Tractors, and straight trucks. Replacement lamps for this type of system can be designed and utilized with different components that still meet FMVSS 108. There are many different lamps produced by different manufacturers, which utilize different bulbs, materials, and optic patterns. All of these lamps comply with the requirements of FMVSS 108, and provide better than adequate safety signals.

2. Boat trailer lamp kits. All OEM trailers are required to meet the lighting requirements of FMVSS 108. Many lighting manufacturers offer a variety of trailer lamp kits to replace the OEM lamps. They offer these kits in a variety of lamp style and component configurations. It is the manufacturers responsibility to assure that these lamps meet the requirements of FMVSS 108.

The interpretation as written does not allow for situations like this, and would limit the consumers ability to replace lamps with equal or better performing product, and the ability to provide cost reductions over the OEM replacement lamp.

The question for the second draft as written in the Federal Register is as follows.

"You asked whether light source modifications are permissible for aftermarket lamps. You stated that manufacturers have submitted replacement lamps to Calcoast-ITL for testing that are intended to replace original equipment lamps. According to your letter, the lamps are "both front and rear combination lamps." As discussed below, replacement lamps must comply with Standard No. 108 using the same light sources as the original equipment. According to your letter, the lamps fall into two categories, and you have asked questions with regard to each category. The categories and questions are as follows:

1. Replacement Lamp Uses OEM Wiring Harness & Sockets

   (a) May a lamp manufacturer design a replacement lamp to use a different wattage bulb, such as switching from an 1157 to a 2057?

   (b) May a lamp manufacturer design a replacement lamp to use a different color bulb? Some manufacturers are switching from a clear bulb behind a red or amber rear turn signal lens to an amber bulb behind a clear lens.

2. Replacement Lamp Uses Modified Wiring Harness and Sockets Supplied With Lamp

   (a) Some manufacturers of replacement lamps are completely changing the bulbs used including wattage, color and base type by including a replacement wiring harness and sockets. Is this permitted?

   (b) Some manufacturers of replacement lamps change the source type from incandescent to sealed LED. Is this permitted?

   The answer to all of these questions is no."

Grote agrees that lamps such as described in the example and in the referenced letters should meet all of the same functions as the OEM supplied and certified lamps. We do not agree however that the use of different components would necessarily cause a vehicle to be out of compliance with FMVSS 108. We commonly provide replacement lamp and component solutions to our customers that meet all of the requirements of FMVSS 108. Many times these solutions require changing lamps, lamp components and wiring harnesses, but as we stated above the installation is performed by trained and qualified service and repair mechanics and the agents involved in making the replacement decisions are also in frequent consultation with the manufacturers to ensure proper compliance

The following situations are examples of current industry practice that may be affected by this interpretation.

1. Both truck tractors and trailers use a common 4" round S/T/T lamp. These lamps are produced by a variety of manufacturers. The majority of 4" round lamps are interchangeable. These lamps come with a variety of bulbs and bulb configurations including LED's that are rated at different design voltages. This interpretation would not allow the replacement of an OEM lamp with a similar 4" round lamp that has a different bulb as the light source.

2. With the advent of newer technologies such as LED's we have been able to produce lamps with clear lenses and colored LED's that easily meet the requirements for photometry and color as specified in FMVSS 108. The interpretation would not allow a red or yellow lamp to be replaced with a red or yellow led with a clear lens. It would not allow an incandescent lamp to be replaced with an LED lamp.

Grote believes that the proposed interpretation would not allow lighting manufacturers to provide the replacement lamp and component solutions that their customers require. Vehicle operators will be required to replace lamps with the OEM lamps only. This would increase their costs, and not allow them to make improvements in safety.

In conclusion, Grote Industries agrees with NHTSA's approach to providing a consistent interpretation for replacement lamps. Lamps designed to replace OEM lamps should contain all of the **functions** of the original lamp they are replacing and not cause the vehicle to be non-compliant with FMVSS 108. However, we disagree that this cannot be accomplished with different components such as light sources, lenses and wiring. Grote has always provided our customers with vehicle solutions that increase safety and lower costs without compromising the compliance of the vehicle.

Best regards,

Tim Brooks
Director Product Development